DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 147 834 CS 203 788

AUTHOR Pickett, Calder M.
TITLE Firebrands of the Revolution.
PUB DATE Aug 76
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (College Park, Maryland, August 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiovisual Aids; Authors; *Journalism; Music; Newspapers; *News Reporting; Press Opinion; *Propaganda; *Revolutionary War (United States); Slides; Tape Recordings; *United States History

ABSTRACT

Prepared as commentary for a slide/tape presentation, this document briefly examines the role of the press in the American Revolution. It discusses propagandist activities led by such agitators as Samuel Adams, newspaper reports of the day that dealt with events of the revolution, and the work of incendiary writers and journalists, including Philip Freneau and Thomas Paine. The document lists the slides used in the presentation and indicates which songs were recorded for use at specified points in the commentary. (GW)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Calder M. Pickett

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED147834

FIREBRANDS OF THE REVOLUTION

By Calder M. Pickett, University of Kansas

Association for Education in Journalism
College Park, Md.
August 1, 1976

(This paper was presented originally at an Editors' Day gathering at the William Allen White School of Journalism, University of Kansas, in the fall of 1975. Since that time I have offered it at several civic-church-educational meetings. It suggests possible use of multimedia to tell the story of the press in the American Revolution. This presentation for AEJ is somewhat modified and somewhat shorter than the original version.)

Welcome to 1776, and to a brief look at the press and its role in the American Revolution. We'll take this look through a number of pictures that illustrate the time, through some music that appeared on the top 40 charts in the 1770s, and through some commentary by me. If you're tired of all this, brace yourselves: some of us will be keeping at this sort of thing at least into 1781.

(Tape: 1776 overture)

Let me start with the historian Eric Goldman, who studied some patriots and some patriotic towns of the Revolution. "Once again," he tells us, "a squat brig Beaver lay moored at dockside, laden with tea chests, and once again a clamorous crowd jostled its way down to Boston Harbor. This time mocking rowboats splashed around the resplendent replica ship. Proclaiming a 'Boston Oil Party,' demonstrators on the water and land denounced the high cost of gasoline and heating oil, chanting 'Freeze prices, not people!' and hurling symbolic empty oil drums into the harbor. With bullhorns in a nearby warehouse, they called for the impeachment of President Nixon and railed against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. Home-made banners supported grape strikers and Greek students, assailed tax loopholes and U.S. foreign policy. Round and round went the protest posters, including--needless to say--'SAM ADAMS--THINK LIKE HIM.'"

CS203 788

Sam Adams, one of three Eric Goldman examined, the others being Patrick Henry and Thomas Paine. Men who made the Revolution, with their broadsides and newspapers and poetry and orations and ballads, men in a direct line from the many who used presses

out of the Gutenberg tradition: Benjamin Harris, John Campbell (Scarcely a rabble-rouser), James Franklin, brother Ben, and of course John Peter Zenger and his group. In the 1760s, when the revolution was a-building, the press came into its own, the dominant force influencing either patriot or loyalist. The propagandists swung into action when the British passed the Stamp Act in 1765, a tax of half a penny for each copy of a two-page paper and one penny for four pages.

Boston was the headquarters of propagandist activity, the focus being in a group calling itself the Caucus Club. Samuel Adams was their leader, a man not heroic in appearance, "something of a humpty-dumpty...essentially the behind-the-scenes type.' He was plain and cheerful of face, a puritan in personal habits, a victim of palsy since his forties, with shaking voice and hands. He had let the family fortune slip away and he owed 18,000 pounds in back taxes to the town of Boston. As early as his Harvard days he had written a thesis in which he asked whether there was any good reason why one should owe loyalty to any ruler. He had a jugular, anything-goes hunger for power, says Goldman, but he was not what we call today a charismatic figure. He and his group conspired and stirred up the angry crowds that met at the Liberty Tree in Boston when Parliament passed the Stamp Act, and at other gatherings where there were free food, drink, fireworks, and rousing speeches, plus much singing and hangings in effigy. One of the favorite songs was "The Liberty Song"

(Tape: Liberty Song 1:05)

July, 1768, and the author was a lawyer named John Dickinson, best known for his "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer," in which he argued for a middle position rather than either separation from the crown or continued support. A fellow on the other side composed a parody for the Boston Gazette: "Come shake your dull noddles, ye pumpkins, and bawl,/ And own you've gone mad at fair liberty's call;/ No scandalous conduct can add to your shame/Condemned to dishonor, inherit the fame./ In folly you're born and in folly you'll live/To madness still ready, stupidly steady,/ Not men, but as monkeys, the tokens you give."

In the time of Dickinson the Sons of Liberty were functioning in Boston, holding their pep rallies and helping to keep things so stirred up that by 1770 the town was shook by the episode we call the Boston Massacre, which brought one of the major pieces of revolutionary propaganda: An engraving made by a man named Paul Revere. And the propagandists kept the fire alive, stirring up that famous tea party of 1773, when Sam Adams and cohorts put on their war paint--possibly in the building housing the newspaper called the Boston Gazette--and dumped the tea into the harbor. A ballad celebrated the incident:

"As near beauteous Boston lying/On the gently swelling flood,/Without jack or pendant flying/Three ill-fated tea ships rode./ Just as glorious Sol was setting,/ On the wharf a numerous crew/Sons of freedom, fear forgetting/Suddenly appeared in view./ Armed with hammers, axe and chisels/ Weapons new for warlike deed,/ Towards the herbage-freighted vessles,/ They approached with dreadful speed./ Quick as thought the ships were boarded,/ Hatches burst and chests displayed; Axes, hammers help afforded;/ What a glorious crash they made./ Squash into the deep descended/ Cursed weed of China's Coast;/ Thus at once our fears were ended;/ British rights shall ne'er be lost./ Captains! Once more hoist your streamers/ Spread your sails, and plough the wave,/ Tell your masters they were dreamers,/ When they thought to cheat the brave."

And there was a hymn, too, that was being sung, the hymn of the revolution, by a man known as our first composer, William Billings:

(Tape: Chester, 1:40)

"On the eighteenth of April,'75, hardly a man is now alive, who remembers that famous day and year." A later poem, by Longfellow, about Paul Revere's ride. On the 19th of April, two battles: "By the rude bridge that arched the flood, their flag to April's breeze unfurled, here once embattled farmers stood, and fired the shot heard "round the world." Another poem of a later time, by Emerson. It was Isaiah Thomas of the Massachusetts Spy who celebrated the battle of Lexington in a story published May 3: "Americans! forever bear in mind the battle of Lexington--where British troops,

unmolested and unprovoked, wantonly and in a most inhuman manner, fired upon and killed a number of our countrymen,..." It was an emotional, scarcely objective, report, but the language of Thomas seems restrained alongside that of the Gazette of Providence, Rhode Island, in describing the British: "base wretches, who fight for pay and plunder; caitiffs devoid of all principles of tenderness, humanity and ...nor/...What may we not expect from such merciless ravagers?--alas, must we see our flourishing country pillaged and laid waste, our houses fired, our fathers massacred, our wives, our mothers, our sisters, and our daughters, fall a prey to brutal and inhuman ravishers; our tender infants torn from the breast, the walls and fences sprinkled with their blood, whilst cries and groans transpierce the yielding air!...forbid it heaven."

(Tape: Corn Cobs,1:40)

"Yankee Doodle." The British created the appellation, the colonials wore it like a badge, and we still love it. Our history is mainly that of the patriots, but on the other side there also was a press pouring out the propaganda. There was Hugh Gaine, turncoat editor of the New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury, but importantly there was James Rivington, who may have been a double agent, a Britisher who started a paper in 1773 called Rivington's New York Gazetteer; or the Connecticut, New Jersey, Hudson's River, and Quebec Weekly Advertiser." Later--the Royal Gazette; to its enemies, the Lying Gazette, with reports of the capture of Washington, the death of Washington, the cowardices of various rebel leaders. Rivington had a way with words; of the new use of Ben Franklin's old snake symbol in cartoons, he wrote: "Ye sons of sedition, how come it to pass, that America's typed, by a snake--in the grass?" Rivington also carried moving social comment, as in this statement by a fleeing royalist:

"I leave America and every endearing connection, because I will not raise my hand against my sovereign; nor will I draw my sword against my country; when I can conscientiously draw it in her favour, my life shall be cheerfully devoted to her service."

Of the patriot agitators an interesting name is that of Philip Freneau, best known in journalism as Jefferson's editor of the National Gazette in the early 1790s.

Freneau was the poet of the Revolution, a partisan who attacked General Gage as he later attacked Washington and Adams. In 1780 he was seized and placed aboard a British prison ship, and of that experience he wrote these words:

"Such food they sent to make complete our woes,/It looked like carrion torn from hungry crows/Such vermin vile on every joint were seen,/So black, corrupted, mortified, and lean,/That once we tried to move our flinty chief,/And thus addressed him, holding up the beef/See, captain, see what rotten bones we pick/What kills the healthy cannot cure the sick/Not dogs on such by Christian men are fed,/And see, good master, see what lousy bread/Your meat or bread, this man of death replied,/ 'Tis not my care to manage or provide/But this, base rebel dogs, I'd have you know,/ That better than your merit we bestow."

One figure I have saved for the last, the man who came along in January of '76 and fired up the American people with his Common Sense. Thomas Paine--an Englishman, son of a corset-maker, a Quaker, and one who had known poverty and hardship. His earliest known work was an epitaph written at eight over a pet crow he had buried: "Here lies the body of John Crow,/ Who once was high, but now is low;/Ye brother Crows, take warning all,/ For as you rise, so must you fall." He became an exciseman, was a friend of Burke, of Goldsmith and of Sheridan, obtained audience with the great Dr. Franklin, and with a letter of introduction came to America in 1774. Richard Bache, Franklin's son-in-law, helped him find lodgings in Philadelphia, and Paine obtained employment with Robert Aitken of the Pennsylvania Magazine. And he began to write Common Sense, which Dr. Benjamin Rush described as "bursting from the press with an effect which has rarely been produced by types and paper in any age or country." All of us know the story of Common Sense, but I cannot avoid reading one passage, words of special meaning: "The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom; but of a continent--of at least one-eighth part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time, by the

proceedings now. Now is the seedtime of continental union, faith and honour. The least fracture now will be like a name engraved with the point of a pin on the tender rind of a young oak; the wound would enlarge with the tree, and posterity read in it full grown characters."

(Tape: White Cockade, 1 min.)

Tom Paine was not through writing. He began to write again, in late '76, in the winter of defeats, when the army of Washington was beaten, hopeless, hungry. There is a legend that Paine wrote by a campfire, on the head of a drum, with the tattered continental soldiers gathered about him. What he wrote was words like these, in his now-famous Crisis papers: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."

When Eric Goldman was doing his research he went to Boston, to a place called Lerner's Cafeteria Delicatessen, at 134 Market Street. Lew Lerner, the proprietor, did not know that it was on the very site of his establishment that Dunlap & Claypoole once existed, a printing house that published the first copies of the Declaration, of the Constitution, of Washington's Farewell Address. He was pleased. He thumped himself on the chest and said: "I'm an American and it smacks me right here that all that stuff happened at my place." Then he said: "They all talk freedom, freedom. But you know damn well some dowager doesn't mean the same thing by 'freedom' as a poor guy. Freedom," he said, "is a complicated thing."

Freedom is a complicated thing. Not to all the propagandists of the Revolution was it complicated, but we know today that it is. Here in 1976, in midst of the celebration of our bicentennial, we have a message offered by a contemporary delicatessen operator in Boston, and by those journalistic forefathers of the Revolution, and by that tough body who signed the Declaration two hundred years ago:

(Tape: finale, 1776,1:23)

The following slides accompany the talk:

1. A press in the Gutenberg Museum, Mainz, Germany
2. Benjamin Harris' Publick Occurrences, Both Forreign and Domestick
3. John Campbell's Boston News-Letter
4. James Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette
5. Benjamin Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette
6. Benjamin West's painting of Franklin capturing electricity
7. King George III
8. An American mob, burning the stamps
9. A cartoon, last rites for the stamps
10. Samuel Adams
11. Paul Revere's engraving of the Boston Massacre
12. A modern tourist at the site of the massacre
13. The Pennsylvania Journal and the Boston Tea Party
14. John Singleton Copley's portrait of Paul Revere
15. Grant Wood's painting, The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere
16. Isaiah Thomas's Massachusetts Spy: The battle of Lexington
17. A British cartoon: killing the American golden goose
18. West's painting of Joseph Brant and Guy Johnson, a Tory
19. Soldiers of the Revolution, Washington in the middle
20. Bunker Hill, June, 1775
21. Montreal, 1775
22. Charleston, 1776
23. John Trumbull's painting, the battle of Princeton
24. Trenton, 1776
25. Trumbull's painting, the surrender at Trenton
26. Saratoga, 1777
27. Monmouth, 1778
28. Vincennes, 1779
29. Guilford Courthouse, 1781
30. Artillerymen of the continental forces, 1781
31. Yorktown, 1781
32. Men of the infantry, 1782
33. Newburgh, Washington's headquarters
34. Tom Paine
35. Paine's study
36. John Adams
37. Roger Sherman
38. Thomas Jefferson
39. Pennsylvania Evening Post, the declaration
40. Pennsylvania Evening Post, second page
41. Trumbull's painting, the Declaration of Independence